CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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Media statement on the decision by the National Conventional Arms Control Committee on the destruction of surplus small arms and light weapons

The South African Government has decided to destroy all surplus small arms rather than sell them. This was announced today by the Chairperson of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), Professor Kader Asmal. It follows a meeting of the NCACC, at which Government Ministers expressed grave concern about the proliferation of small arms which is having a devastating effect on the socio-economic development and reconstruction of civil societies in Southern Africa. Such proliferation endangers the democratic pursuits which are presently being consolidated in the region. The availability of uncontrolled surplus small arms after the resolution of various armed conflicts is one of the sources of illicit small arms.

The United Nations Secretary General's Report on Small Arms of 27 August 1997 recommended, amongst other things, that States should exercise restraint on the transfer of surplus small arms manufactured solely for possession and use by the military and police forces. The Report also recommended that all States should consider the possibility of destroying all surplus small arms.

In accordance with the Government's policy on non-proliferation and arms control, the NCACC decided that redundant small arms in the possession of the South African Government be destroyed rather than sold on a tender basis as done previously. When destruction takes place it will be public, and media representatives will be invited. The legal and technical implications of the destruction of these small arms are presently being considered.

The South African Police Service has already begun the process of its destruction of surplus small arms. On 6 October 1997 the South African Police Service melted down 20 tons of firearms. A total of 4 504 confiscated firearms, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns and homemade firearms were also destroyed. The commercial value of these arms is estimated to be in excess of R2 million. Subsequently the South African Police Service has destroyed an additional 11 tons of confiscated ammunition and 10 tons of confiscated small arms, 9 tons of obsolete/outdated ammunition and 20 tons of redundant/obsolete small arms.

"This decision forms part of the Government's strategy to curtail the excessive and destabilising accumulation of small arms. The magnitude of the problem is of such a nature that it can only be addressed through appropriate national, regional and international action. We have begun on a national scale in South Africa," said the NCACC Chairperson.

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